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A UNIQUE CASE
OF
TRAUMATIC NEUROSIS.

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BY

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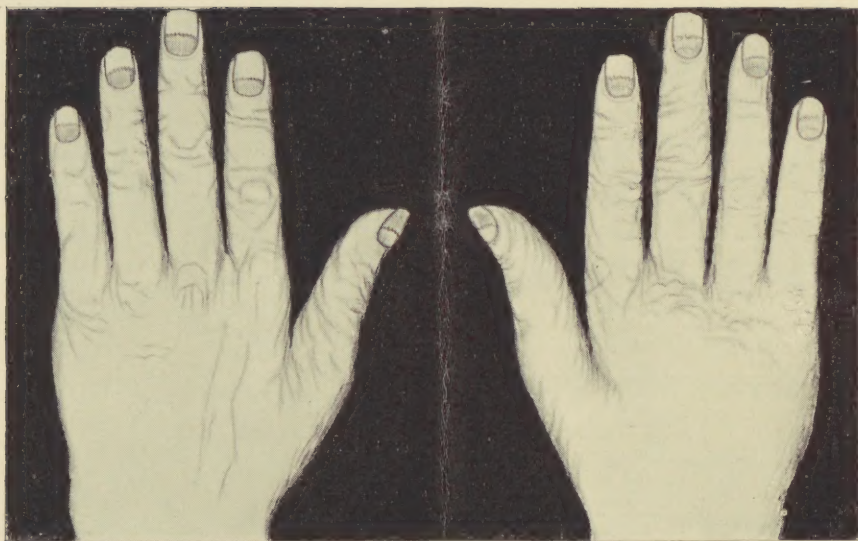


FIG. 1.—Appearance of the hands in a case of traumatic neurosis, showing distinctly the line of demarcation between the dead and living tissues of the nails.



FIG. 2.—Similar appearance of the toe-nails in the same case.

A UNIQUE CASE OF TRAUMATIC NEUROSIS.

ON March 20, 1892, I was called to Penn Yan, New York, in consultation for a case which proved to be one of traumatic neurosis. I reached there on March 23, and drove some nine miles in the country to see a farmer, from whom I obtained the following interesting history and report:

History.—Perry A. G., age sixty-three, a farmer by occupation, with the exception of an attack of typhoid fever, from which he suffered some twenty-seven years previous, had never been obliged to call a physician until after an injury he received in a railroad accident on October 14, 1891.

He stated that when the accident occurred he was sitting by himself near the front of the right side of the ladies' car; the first thing he noticed wrong was the rapid jolting of the car, then a "rush" to the left side of the coach, when he became unconscious. The first thing he observed when his consciousness returned was that he was piled up in a corner of the car in the midst of a conglomerate heap, consisting of seats, valises, and passengers, many of whom were either dead or dying.

He found he was injured in the left side, and that it was very difficult for him to get his breath. His first endeavor was to extricate himself from his uncomfortable surroundings, which he succeeded in doing without aid, and walked out of the car (which had been derailed) without assistance. After getting out of the car he was assisted to a hotel near by, where he was seen by a doctor, who gave him a superficial examination, and who congratulated him on having his "pins" left so he could walk, and advised him to return to his home, some three hundred miles distant, as soon as possible.

Nine hours after the accident he boarded a train and started for his home. He stated, however, that before leaving the scene of the accident he would first get sick and think he was going to vomit, and would then have a chill and break out in a profuse perspiration. This continued for several hours after the accident, the nausea, chills, and perspiration alternating quite regularly with each other.

After arriving home and being dressed by his family physician, he found that he was bruised over the point of the left shoulder, along the left side, including the outer aspect of the left arm and leg, all of which he stated were "black and blue" for days after the accident, but that outside of that he did not know that he was injured at all, excepting a few scratches on the face and forehead, beyond the fracture of two or three ribs on the left side, which he said were not dressed until he reached home, when they were dressed by his family physician.

At the time of my visit some five months later, he told me that he never had any difficulty about getting drowsy at his usual bedtime, and after retiring would go to sleep; but he complained that a few hours later he would awaken with what he described as a "terrible nightmare," and find himself wet with perspiration and suffering from fright, which he attributed to some "horrible dream" regarding some "terrible disaster" of some kind from which he would imagine he could not escape.

He said, however, that his appetite was good, his bowels were regular, that he had no trouble with his urine, had no pain in the region of the stomach, and that he had not vomited since the accident. In fact, he said he did not suffer from any pain at this time, although he had lost from fifteen to twenty pounds in weight.

OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE SYMPTOMS.

I found him with a pulse of 90, temperature $98\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$, tongue furred with a white coat, which had the appearance of what is often termed "water-soaked." Provisional callus was distinctly discernible near the angle of the fourth rib, less distinctly marked near the angle of the fifth rib, and still more feebly appreciable at the angle of the sixth rib.

Whilst he complained of tenderness over each of these points, he complained more of pain on movement of the left arm, which, owing to this, prevented him from using it with the same freedom he did the right. On pressure over the point of the left shoulder, corresponding to the acromion process, and also at another point corresponding to the coracoid process, he complained of excruciating pain. In addition to this he complained of pain, on pressure, running down the course of the superficial nerves of the arm to the ends of the fingers.

I stripped him naked prior to this examination, and examined his back carefully, but found nothing abnormal. He said he never had a pain in his back, and had none at this time at any point along the vertebral column, and that the only soreness he had was in the left shoulder and arm, left side and left leg, any one of which, on pressure with the finger, would give what he called "shots" of pain extending through the limb to its extremity.

On examining the heart, I found the sounds normal and the rhythm regular, although the heart's action was from twelve to fourteen beats to the minute too fast. I examined his entire body carefully for any lesions or indications of abnormal conditions, with negative results, excepting as hereinafter described.

I discovered, however, what to my mind was the unquestionable results of a terrible fright, which was demonstrated by the fact that his toe- and finger-nails, together with his hair and beard, had all died at the time of the accident, and were being replaced by a new growth. I do not mean by this that the old nails and hair had died and dropped off *en masse*, but there was every evidence necessary to convince me that they had all died at the same time, and evidently from the same cause, and were being replaced

by new nails and new hair. The former had grown out on each toe and finger about one-third of the ordinary nail area (which can be better understood by examining the accompanying cuts). The line of demarcation between the dead and the living nails was so regular on each toe and finger, and so very distinct, and the distance the new nail had grown compared so favorably with the time that had expired since the accident, that no other conclusion was left for me to arrive at than that this disturbance of the nutrition of the hair and nails occurred at the time of the accident, and was the direct result of the terrible fright caused by the wreck.

The hair and the beard had grown out so that, with the exception of the color, it resembled very much a person who had had his hair and whiskers dyed, destroying their vitality, but which had since grown out, showing a crop of new hair next the skin tipped with old dead hair that had been destroyed by the coloring material used.

I secured a specimen of the urine, which, with the exception of a high specific gravity, revealed nothing abnormal.

In having the gentleman walk over the floor to and fro, I observed that he struck a sort of halting gait. In other words, he seemed afraid to step out free and easy. I inquired why he walked in this peculiar way, and he replied that he was not afraid of falling, but that he was afraid if he stepped out full and free it would cause him pain in his left leg, and consequently he walked in a halting fashion as a safeguard against giving himself unnecessary pain.

I regret, however, that just prior to my visit there had been a remarkable snow-storm in that region, so that in driving from Penn Yan to this gentleman's home, some nine miles distant, we were obliged to take to the fields in many places in order to get around the snow-drifts, which were from two to twenty feet high, and, as we were not expecting to make a discovery of this kind, we did not go prepared with a kodak, and consequently did not get a photograph of this interesting case, but I have endeavored to have an artist present the existing conditions, as I saw them, as nearly correct as possible, although not quite so satisfactory as a photograph. (See Figs. 1 and 2.)

Remarks.—The subject of this report is still living, and whilst the dead hair and finger-nails have all been replaced by new ones, yet the man has never regained his former health, and in all probability never will.

After studying the leading features in this interesting case, I could not arrive at any other conclusion than that this unique pathological condition was the consequence of a profound nervous shock received at the time of the accident, resulting in this unusual manifestation, involving the nails and the hair. There is no doubt in my mind that the fright affected the nerves to such an extent as to temporarily cut off the nourishment of the hair and nails and thus cause their death. Yet the shock was not sufficiently grave to permanently destroy the trophic centres, and consequently the nerves rallied from their suspended animation and resumed their physiological functions.

I cannot satisfy myself that the physical injuries received in this accident, which only amounted to the fracture of three ribs and the bruising of the muscles and nerves of the left side, are sufficient grounds on which to base a theory for the symmetrical death of the hair and nails of the entire body.

Every surgeon who has had an extended experience in emergency cases can point to scores of injuries much more serious to the general structures of the body than this one was without the least injury to the nails or the hair.

It is true we frequently have the nails dying and being replaced with new nails after severe injuries, which has been followed by destructive inflammation, similar to that resulting from a felon, but these are every-day occurrences, and are easily accounted for by the localized temporary arrest of nutrition. But in this case the symmetrical death not only of the nails on the hands and feet occurred, but also of the hair and whiskers, which to my mind is beyond a question of a doubt the result of a profound nervous shock. In other words, this man, instead of being crushed to death, or even injured to any great extent physically, was almost "scared to death," the fright being of such a degree as to interfere not only with the nutrition of the nails and hair, but for months afterwards with his assimilation, which, as a consequence, impaired the general nutrition of the entire economy.

Although rare, it is not a strange occurrence for fright, nervous excitement, or mental anxiety to cause the hair to turn white in a few hours. Landois records a case of this character, in which the hair became gray during a single night, the result of an attack of delirium tremens.

Again, cases are on record where injuries to the brain, such as a fall, sometimes result in paralysis of the hair-follicles, so that after such an injury the hair is lost over nearly the whole of the body. But thus far I have failed to find the record of a single case in which either physical injury or fright caused the death of all the hair on the body, together with all the finger- and toe-nails.

CONCLUSIONS.

From this case we learn :

1. That it is possible to have a fright of sufficient gravity to arrest the functions of the nerves long enough to cause the death not only of the hair, but also of its larger and stronger relatives, the nails.

2. That a profound shock producing such marked results cannot but affect the entire nervous system, and as a consequence, as is demonstrated by this case, produce a well-marked case of marasmus.

3. That this is another clinical demonstration favoring the theory held by many eminent neurologists at the present time, that we *cannot have a permanent lesion of the nervous system without a corresponding physical manifestation.*

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